

THE PARSEES OF INDIA

A PEOPLE OF MANY STRANGE SUPERSTITIONS.

Dr. Talmage Writes of His Visit to Bombay—Dead Bodies Carried to the Vulture—Christianity and Zoroastrianism Compared.

BROOKLYN, Dec. 23, 1894.—Dr. Talmage, continuing his series of "Round the World Sermons," through the press, chose to-day for his subject, "The Fire Worshipers," the text selected being: "There came wise men from the east to Jerusalem."

These wise men were the Parsees or the so-called fire worshippers, and I found their descendants in India last October. Their heathenism is more tolerable than any of the other false religions, and has more alleviations, and while in these "Round the World" series I have already shown you the worst forms of heathenism, to-day I show you the least offensive.

The prophet of the Parsees was Zoroaster of Persia. He was poet, philosopher and reformer, as well as a religiousist. His disciples thrived at first in Persia, but under Mohammedan persecution they retreated to India where I met them, and in addition to what I saw of them at their headquarters in Bombay, India, I had two weeks of association with one of the most learned and genial of their people on ship board from Bombay to Brindisi.

The Bible of the Parsees, or fire worshippers as they are inaccurately called, is the Zend-Avesta, a collection of the strangest books that ever came into my hands. There were originally twenty-one volumes, but Alexander the Great, in a drunken fit set fire to a palace which contained some of them, and they went into ashes and forgetfulness. But there are more of their sacred volumes left than most people would have patience to read. There are many things in the religion of the Parsees that suggest Christianity, and some of its doctrines are in accord with our own religion. Zoroaster, who lived 2,400 years before Christ, was a good man, suffered persecution for his faith, and was assassinated while worshipping at an altar. He announced the theory "He is best who is pure of heart," and that there are two great spirits in the world, Ormuzd, the good spirit, and Ahriman, the bad spirit, and that all who do right are under the influence of Ormuzd, and all who do wrong are under Ahriman; that the Parsee must be born on the ground floor of the house, and must be buried from the ground floor; that the dying man must have prayers said over him and a sacred juice given him to drink; that the good at their decease go into eternal light, and the bad into eternal darkness; that having passed out of this light the soul lingers near the corpse three days in a paradisaic state, enjoying more than all the nations on earth put together could enjoy or in a pandemoniac state suffering more than all the nations put together could possibly suffer, but at the end of three days departing for its final destiny; and that there will be a resurrection of the body. They are more careful than any other people about their ablutions, and they wash and wash and wash. They pay great attention to physical health and it is a rare thing to see a sick Parsee. They do not smoke tobacco for they consider that a misuse of fire. At the close of mortal life the soul appears at the Bridge Chinvat, where an angel presides, and questions the soul about its thoughts, and words, and deeds of its earthly state. Nothing, however, is more intense in the Parsee faith than the theory that the dead body is impure. A devil is supposed to take possession of the dead body. All who touch it are unclean and hence the strange style of obsequies. But here I must give three or four questions and answers from one of the Parsee catechisms:

Q.—Who is the most fortunate man in the world?
A.—He who is the most innocent.
Q.—Who is the most innocent man in the world?
A.—He who walks in the path of God and shuns that of the devil.
Q.—Which is the path of God, and which that of the devil?
A.—Virtue is the path of God, and vice that of the devil.
Q.—What constitutes virtue, and what vice?
A.—Good thoughts, good words, and good deeds constitute virtue, and evil thoughts, evil words, and evil deeds constitute vice.
Q.—What constitutes good thoughts, good words, and good deeds, and evil thoughts, evil words, and evil deeds?
A.—Honesty, charity, and truthfulness constitute the former; and dishonesty, want of charity, and falsehood constitute the latter.
And now the better to show you these Parsees, I tell you of two things I saw within a short time in Bombay, India. It was an afternoon of contrast.

We started for Malabar Hill, on which the wealthy classes have their embowered homes, and the Parsees their strange temple of the dead. As we rode along the water's edge the sun was descending the sky, and a disciple of Zoroaster, a Parsee, was in lowly posture and with reverential gaze looking into the sky. He would have been said to have been worshipping the sun, as all Parsees are said to worship the fire. But the intelligent Parsee does not worship the fire. He looks upon the sun as the emblem of the warmth and light of the creator. Looking at the blaze of light, whether on earth, on mountain height, or in the sky, he can more easily bring to mind the glory of God; at least, so the Parsees tell me. Indeed, they are the nearest to the heathen I have met. They

treat their wives as equals, while the Hindus and Buddhists treat them as cattle; although the cattle, and sheep, and swine are better off than most of the women of India.

This Parsee on the roadside on our way to Malabar Hill was the only one of that religion I had ever seen engaged in worship. Who knows but that beyond the light of the sun on which he gazes he may catch a glimpse of the God who is light, and "in whom there is no darkness at all?"

We passed up through gates into the garden that surrounds the place where the Parsees dispose of their dead. This garden was given by Jamshidji Jijibhai, and is beautiful with flowers of all hue, and foliage of all styles of vein, and notch and stature. There is on all sides great opulence of fern and cypress. The garden is 100 feet above the level of the sea. Not far from the entrance is a building where the mourners of the funeral procession go to pray. A light is here kept burning year in and year out. We ascend the garden by some eight stone steps. The body of a deceased aged woman was being carried in toward the chief "Tower of Silence." There are five of these towers. Several of these have not been used for a long while. Four persons, whose business it is to do this carry in the corpse. They are followed by two men with long beards. The Tower of Silence, to which they come cost \$150,000, and its twenty-five feet high, and 270 feet around, and without a roof. The four carriers of the dead and the two bearded men come to the door of the tower enter and leave the dead. There are three rows of places for the dead: the outer row for the men; the middle row for women; the inside row for the children. The lifeless bodies are left exposed as far down as the waist. As soon as the employees retire from the Tower of Silence, the vultures, now one, now two, now many, swoop upon the lifeless form. These vultures fill the air with their discordant voices. We saw them in long rows on the top of the whitewashed wall of the Tower of Silence. In a few minutes they have taken the last particle of flesh from the bodies. There had evidently been other opportunities for them that day, and some flew away as though surfeited. They sometimes carry away with them parts of a body, and it is no unusual thing for the gentlemen in their country seats to have dropped into their dooryards a bone from the Tower of Silence.

In the center of this tower is a well, into which the bones are thrown after they are bleached. The hot sun, and the rainy season, and charcoal do their work of disintegration and disinfection, and then there are sluices that carry into the sea what remains of the dead. The wealthy people of Malabar Hill have made strenuous efforts to have these strange towers removed as a nuisance, but they remain, and will no doubt for ages remain.

Starting homeward we soon were in the heart of the city, and saw a building all aflash with lights and resounding with merry voices. It was a Parsee wedding, in a building erected especially for the marriage ceremony. We came to the door and proposed to go in, but at first were not permitted. They saw we were not Parsees, and that we were not even natives. So very politely they halted us on the doorsteps. This temple of nuptials was chiefly occupied by women, their ears, and necks, and hands aflash with jewels, or imitations of jewels. By pantomime gesture, as we had no use of their vocabulary, we told them we were strangers and were curious to see by what process Parsees were married. Gradually we worked our way inside the door. The building and the surroundings were illumined by hundreds of candles in glasses and lanterns, in unique and grotesque hold-ings. Conversation ran high, and laughter bubbled over and all was gay. Then there was a sound of an advancing band of music, but the instruments for the most part were strange to our ears and eyes. Louder and louder were the outside voices, and the wind and stringed instruments until the procession halted at the door of the temple and the bridegroom mounted the steps. Then the music ceased, and all the voices were still. The mother of the bridegroom, with a platter loaded with aromatics and articles of food, confronted her son and began to address him. Then she took from the platter a bottle of perfume and sprinkled his face with the redolence. All the while speaking in a droning tone, she took from the platter a handful of rice, throwing some of it on his head, pouring some of it on his shoulder, pouring some of it on his hands. She took from the platter a coconut and waved it about his head. She lifted a garland of flowers and threw it over his neck and a bouquet of flowers and put it in his hand. Her part of the ceremony completed, the band resumed its music and through another door the bridegroom was conducted into the center of the building. The bride was in the room, but there was nothing to designate her. "Where is the bride?" I said, "where is the bride?" After a while she was made evident. The bride and groom were seated on chairs opposite each other. A white curtain was dropped between them so that they could not see each other. Then the attendants put their arms under this curtain, took a long rope of linen and wound it around the neck of the bride and the groom, in token that they were to be bound together for life. Then some silk strings were wound around the couple, now around this one, and now around that. Then the groom threw a handful of rice across the curtain on the head of the bride, and the bride responded by throwing a handful of rice across the curtain on the head of the groom. Hereupon the curtain dropped and the bride's chair was removed and put beside that of the groom. Then a priest of the Parsee religion arose and faced the couple. Before the priest

was placed a platter of rice. He began to address the young man and woman. We could not hear a word, but we understood just as well as if we had heard. Ever and anon he punctuated his ceremony by a handful of rice, which he picked up from the platter and flung now toward the groom and now toward the bride. We wanted to hear the conclusion, but were told that the ceremony would go on for a long while; indeed, that it would not conclude until 2 o'clock in the morning, and this was only between 7 and 8 o'clock in the evening. There would be a recess after awhile in the ceremony, but it would be taken up again in earnest at half past twelve. We enjoyed what we had seen, but felt incapacitated for six more hours wedding ceremony. Silently wishing the couple a happy life in each other's companionship, we pressed our way through the throng of congratulatory Parsees. All of them seem bright and appreciative of the occasion. The streets outside joyously sympathized with the transactions inside.

But, what an afternoon of contrast in Bombay we experienced! From the Temple of Silence to the Temple of Hilarity! From mourning to laughter! From gathering shuddows to gleaming light! From obsequies to wedding! But how much of all our lives is made up of such opposites. I have carried in the same pocket, and read from in the same hour, liturgy of the dead and the ceremony of espousals. And so the tears meet the smile, and the dove meets the vulture.

Thus I have set before you the best of all the religions of the heathen world, and I have done so in order that you might come to higher appreciation of the glorious religion which has put its benediction over us and over Christendom.

Compare the absurdities and mummeries of heathen marriage with the plain, "I will," of Christian marriage, the hands joined in pledge "till death do you part." Compare the doctrine that the dead may not be touched, with as sacred and tender and loving a kiss as is ever given, the last kiss of lips that never again will speak to us. Compare the narrow Bridge Chinvat over which the departing Parsee soul must tremblingly cross, to the wide open gate of heaven through which the departing Christian soul may triumphantly enter. Compare the twenty-one books of the Zend Avesta of the Parsee which even the scholars of the earth despair of understanding, with our Bible, so much of it as is necessary for our salvation in language so plain that "a wayfaring man, though a fool need not err therein." Compare the "Tower of Silence" with its vultures of Bombay with the "Greenwood of Brooklyn" with its sculptured angels of resurrection. And bow yourselves in thanksgiving and prayer as you realize that it at the battles of Marathon and Salamis, Persia had triumphed over Greece, instead of Greece triumphing over Persia, Parseism, which was the national religion of Persia, might have covered the earth, and you and I instead of sitting in the noonday light of our glorious Christianity might have been groping in the depressing shadows of Parseism, a religion which is as inferior to that which is our inspiration in life, and our hope in death, as Zoroaster of Persia was inferior to our radiant and superhuman Christ, to whom be honor and glory and dominion and victory and song, world without end. Amen.

ITEMS OF INTEREST.

The clam is commonly taken for an example of all that is unprogressive, but he is by no means a stationary creature. Every man bred at the seaside knows how a clam left upon the sand will utterly disappear by sinking himself below the surface; but the clam also has a forward movement, and will travel thirty feet in the course of a week. The large muscle of the clam, which helps to make him indistinct, is his single leg, and by the aid of this he makes his progress.

Mullet fishing by night in the Chesapeake is exciting sport. A small boat is used and a light is placed in the stern. When a school of the fish is sighted near the shore the boat is rapidly rowed toward them until they are driven ashore. Once they feel the land beneath them they begin to leap toward the light. Then the boat is depressed on the shoreward side, so as to bring the other side high above the water. The consequence is that many of the fish leap into the boat and are thus taken.

A British officer, who apparently knows, says that it "would be as reasonable to pit brave men armed with pikeforks against brave men armed with rifles as to pit man for man, the Chinese in their present condition against the Japanese. Of all native and colonial troops," says he, "I would, next to Gorkhas, prefer a regiment of Japanese. They are brave, temperate, patient and energetic, and at this moment the Chinese, whatever might be done with them, are 300 years behind the times."

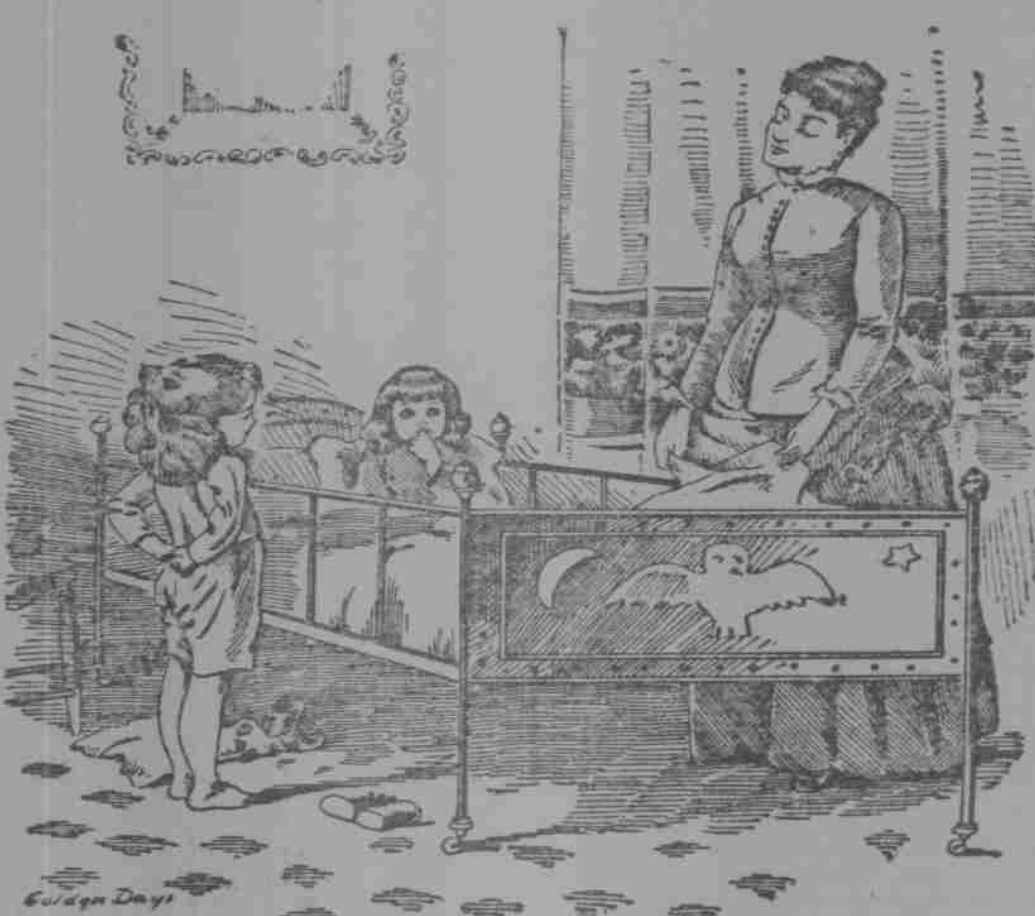
"It may almost be claimed," says Prof. Warren P. Laird, of the University of Pennsylvania, "that Philadelphia is at once the most curious, the most typical and the most instructive of American cities—curious because of the strange medley of its more pretentious buildings and their singularly eccentric individualism; typical of American practice in its broadest aspect, because of the absence of restraint and defiance of precedent shown by the great majority of its architects; and instructive, because of its contrast, for no other American city has so wide a field of architectural error to offer in contrast to its works of real merit."

There can be no doubt that the talk of grape seeds and appendicitis has affected the price of grapes unfavorably, in spite of the fact that the grape cure a few years ago was in high vogue.



CONGRESSMAN BRYAN, OF NEBRASKA.

William Jennings Bryan was born in Harrison county, Ill., March 19, 1856; attended public school until fifteen years of age, spending his vacations on the farm; entered Illinois college at Jacksonville in 1877, completed a classical course and was graduated with high honors in 1881; attended Union College of Law, Chicago, for two years, during which time he was connected with the office of Ex-Senator Lyman Trumbull; began the practice of his profession at Jacksonville, Ill.; removed to Lincoln, Neb., in 1887. He never held an elective office until chosen to represent the First Nebraska district in the Fifty-second congress. He was re-elected two years later, his term of office to expire March 4 next. He attained considerable fame recently by running for United States senator on the populist-democratic ticket.



LITTLE MATTHEW—Mamma, do you suppose Santa Claus will come this Christmas?
MAMMA—Certainly he will.
LITTLE MATTHEW—Will you see him before he comes?
MAMMA (cautiously)—Perhaps.
LITTLE MATTHEW—Well, if you do, please tell him not to bring us anything useful.—Golden Days.



EN FAMILLE.

WILLIE—Say, pa, I'm smarter'n you!
PAPA—Think so, my boy? Why?
WILLIE—You said yesterday when Dr. Brown began to talk you couldn't keep awake five minutes. I've kept awake ten.—Harper's Bazar.

English Bread Sauce For Fowl.

Put a cupful of bread crumbs into half a pint of milk, add a clove of garlic or a small onion left whole, a blade of mace, a lump of butter about the size of a pecan nut, pepper and salt. Let the mixture boil until it thickens to the consistency of drawn butter. The onion and mace are removed when it is put into the sauce tureen. It is much daintier and more wholesome than gravy.

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—Washington Star.

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